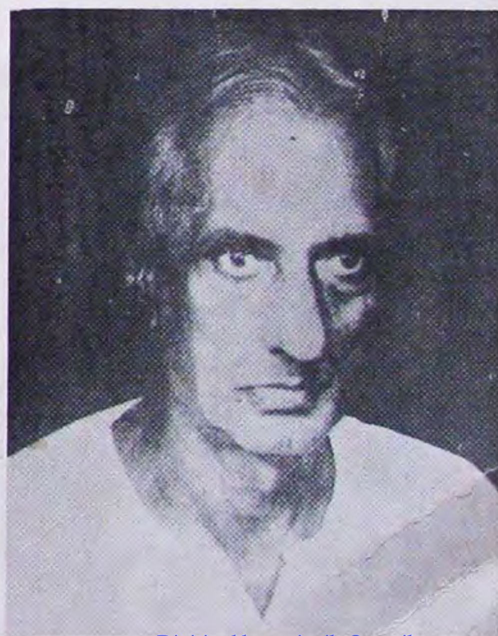


Aswini Kumar Ghose

Hemant Kumar Das



Makers of Indian Literature

The sculpture reproduced on the endpaper depicts a scene where three sothsayers are interpreting to King Suddhodana the dream of Queen Maya, mother of Lord Buddha. Below them is seated a scribe recording the interpretation. This is perhaps the earliest available pictorial record of the art of writing in India.

From Nagarjunakonda, 2nd century A.D.
Courtesy National Museum, New Delhi.

MAKERS OF INDIAN LITERATURE

Aswini Kumar Ghose

Hemant Kumar Das



Sahitya Akademi

SAHITYA AKADEMI

Rabindra Bhavan, 35 Ferozeshah Road. New Delhi 110 001
Sales SWATI. Mandir Marg, New Delhi 110 001
Jeevantara, 23A/44X, Diamond Harbour Road,
Calcutta 700 053
Guna Buildings, II Floor, 304-305 Anna Salai,
Teynampet, Chennai 600 018
172 Mumbai Marathi Grantha Sangrahalaya Marg,
Dadar, Mumbai 400 014
ADA Rangamandir, 109 J. C. Road, Bangalore 560 002

ISBN 81-260-0491-6

First Published 1998

Price Rs. 25

Published by the Sahitya Akademi
Laser type Setting by
Image Alliance, 91\24A Bose Pukur Road,
Kasba, Calcutta 700 042
Printed at
Rama Art Press, 6/30 Dum Dum Road,
Calcutta 700 030

Preface

During my childhood days I saw few of Aswini Kumar's plays on stage and later on while doing my research work on Oriya drama, I had a closer view of his plays. I was simply charmed by Aswini Kumar's versatile genius, which produced plays of all types—mythological, historical, social, biographical, devotional, tragedy, comedy, tragi-comedy, farces etc., a rare phenomena found with any other dramatist. I was convinced that his popularity was due to the blending of the religious and the supernatural, the humanization of the divine and the elevation of man to a high moral and spiritual level, as also due to a direct appeal to the heart through a straight forward narrative language that easily impressed the common mass. Aswini Kumar intimately studied the psychology of the average Oriya audience and gave them what they cherished most.

This monograph, which has been written for the non-Oriya readers, tries to assess Aswini Kumar's dramatic talent, his philosophy of life and ultimately his success and failure as a dramatist. Today Aswini Kumar occupies a vulnerable position in the history of Oriya drama. But throughout his life, he had to struggle hard to find out a place in the Oriya dramatic arena. In this venture, I have tried to throw some light on some of the remarkable aspects of this genius, who dedicated himself, at the alter of Oriya drama. My labours shall be suitably rewarded, if my readers enjoy this work.

I convey my deep gratitude to Shri Basant Kumar Das, Joint State Editor, Gazetteers Orissa, Bhubaneswar for going carefully through the manuscript and suggesting valuable changes. I am also thankful to the Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi for giving me the opportunity of writing this monograph.

Haramani Nivas
Deul Sahi
Cuttack 753 008

Hemant Kumar Das

Contents

I

Prologue

The first modern Oriya drama *Babaji* (The Hermit) was written in 1877 by Late Jaganmohan Lala of Mahanga, a remote village of Cuttack district. This was a social play written with the aim to reform the society.

Before going deep into the matter it will not be redundant to discuss in nut-shell the socio-cultural conditions of Orissa during the second half of the 19th century. Orissa was occupied by the Britishers in 1803, but due to various reasons, the rulers did not pay proper attention for its development. In 1866 due to the negligence of the administration a great famine occurred in this land for which one-third of the total population of Orissa died. After this painful event, the administrators became conscious about their duty and tried to take some steps for the development of the territory. Gradually means of modern communications were improved, educational institutions were established and hospitals and postal facilities were provided. The advent of this consciousness gave birth to a new class, the educated and conscious middle class, that developed a habit of protesting to everything unreasonable.

Printing presses were established and news papers and periodicals came out where the opinion of the educated middle class was ventilated. The intellectuals tried their level best to improve the condition of the society by introducing various types of reforms. Problems of the society were manifold. Untouchability, child marriage, addiction, lack of scientific approach, inequality between the sexes, indifference towards education especially female education, were weaker points of the society. Literature, particularly, dramatic literature, being

a vital media of reforms was utilised.

During this period two parallel streams of visual arts were flowing in the cultural arena—one being the traditional Sanskrit plays, and the other—folk-plays. As only selected few had access to Sanskrit plays which were of the elites by the elites and for the elites, the common mass had to quench their thirst of entertainment through the folk-plays. The folk dramas mostly in the form of musical works were accused of obscenity by the educated mass, in the beginning, as sentiments of love and sex played a vital role in these writings. The first modern Oriya drama as earlier mentioned was written with a motive to reform the society. The trend set by Jagan Mohan Lala was later followed by Ram Shankar, Bhikari Charan, Bira Bikram, Kampal and other contemporary play-wrights. This trend was kept in tact, atleast for half a century.

The dramatists of the first phase of Oriya drama (1877-1920) assimilated the Western dramaturgy with the Eastern dramaturgy and built a novel dramatic tradition in Oriya literature. Proscenium stage of the Western countries found its place in our dramas and use of scenes, drops, frills and wings became inevitable. Everything of the western stage-craft was imitated. Tragedy, till then unknown in Indian drama, was introduced and within a short time became an important trend due to its novelty. Gradually, many other aspects collected from the Western literature found a permanent place in our dramas and lost their alien character. Even though the dramatists decided to follow the Western trend, the traditional method was not totally discarded. Rather, there was an anxiety to maintain its own identity. The second phase of Oriya drama started from 1920. However from 1920 to 1930 the Oriya drama experienced a period of crisis. This is the period of the Greens (Sabuja) in the field of Oriya poetry. Prose and drama were struggling hard to emancipate themselves from the clutches of tradition and to embrace the modern literary trends. The audiences of this land were also prepared to welcome anything

new in the dramas as they were already fed up with the available stuff.

However there was a great barrier in the field of the development of Oriya drama. Dramatic art had not earned a respectable name by this time, and persons connected with this are were chided as 'dancer-boys'. The contemporary newspapers were also not very much favourable to this branch of art. Even if there were some reasons for adverse reaction, still credit goes to these 'dancer-boys' who gave the dramatic literature of Orissa its present shape.

As stated elsewhere the first phase of Oriya drama was reformative in nature. This aspect being given prominence the real artistic aspect became weak. The stage became the stage for propagating reformation. The dramatists of the second phase were fully conscious about this weakness. Even though reformative attitude could not be totally discarded, it was replaced by 'Reformation for art' slogan. Quinine was there, but it was concealed under a thick coat of sugar. Art pushed backward the reformative attitude in Oriya plays.

Two socially conscious dramatists of this period viz., Aswini Kumar Ghose and Kali Charan Patnaik, atleast could understood the harmful aspects of the reformative attitude and tried in their literary efforts to give art its due respect, though at the same time both were determined to improve the social system through their creations.

The Oriya dramatists of the second phase led by Aswini Kumar, fully conscious about their responsibility towards the society, started getting prominence in literature during the twenties of the current century, and a new era for the Oriya theatre dawned.

It may be mentioned here that political uncertainty, slackness in traditional stage-craft, attachment of the common mass towards devotional poetry, inactive social condition of the medieval period and last but not the least, the prose—not in a developed form—are responsible for the dearth of original

Oriya plays during the pre-Lala period. Self conscious Lala in his writings with realistic approach and message to the society created favourable atmosphere for others to follow.

The dramatists of the second phase did not get much from their predecessors. They fought against various odds and established their own tradition. The first and foremost difficulty in this field was absence of any permanent stage in Orissa. Jagamohan Lala had his own stage, 'Radhakanta Theatre', where he staged his own dramas. Ramshankar had an amateur theatre party, which took much strain to stage some of his dramas. Fortunately he got a patron in Mahanta Raghunath Puri of Kothapada who was a great lover of drama. He provided a stage for Ramshankar's plays. Ramshankar was a lawyer by profession, and the Mahanta was his client. Kothapada stage was a boon in disguise for the Oriya dramas. 'Usha Pandal' at Cuttack during this period staged a few dramas of Bhikari Charan and got closed. Of course there were some amateur groups that staged dramas occasionally, and then there were some rulers of feudatary states like Nilgiri, Chikiti, Nayagarh, Parlakhemundi, Khariar etc., who had their own stages for dramatic performances. However, the dearth of stage in Orissa was a great barrier in producing dramatists. Maintenance of a stage was very expensive and rich people here were indifferent to this form of art.

Aswini Kumar was fortunate from this regard. He got the patronage of Banamali Pati—a Naib who owned 'Radhakrushna Theatre', a professional party. After the death of Pati, Aswini Kumar purchased this stage and managed it for long eight years. After the closure of the above theatre, Ghose was patronised by Annapurna Group—a leading theatre party of the forties and fifties of this century. Hence he never faced any difficulty for staging his plays. His contemporary dramatist, Kali Charan Patnaik, was more fortunate as he had his own stage, at first 'Sakhigopal Natya Sangha' and then 'Orissa Theatres' where all his plays were staged. Later on, after the

closure of Orissa Theatre, he also wrote few dramas for Annapurna Groups of Theatres. Later on, apart from Annapurna, some other new stages like Janata, Kalashree came up which encouraged many dramatists. This may be called the Golden age for Oriya drama.

From the beginning, Oriya playwrights tried to reach the audience by depicting art, culture and heroism of Orissa through their dramas. Gradually patriotism was added to it towards the beginning of the present century. Utkal Sammilani, a get-to-together of the Oriyas, was first organised by late Madhusudan Das as its founder, in 1903, to bring all the Oriya speaking people into a single and compact sphere, under one banner, and he requested all the Oriyas to sacrifice their personal interest to build a new Orissa. During this period Gopabandhu Das—the great patriot, led a group of educated young men who vowed to improve the condition of the motherland. Thus the Oriya patriotism of the early part of the century amalgamated in the all India call of freedom movement given by the great saint of Sabarmati. The message of freedom struggle found its place in all forms of literature.

Ramshankar preached the message of Utkal Sammilani in his dramas. Pandit Godavarish, an active member of the Satyavadi School, preached the message of patriotism through his dramatic creations like, *Mukunda Dev* and *Purusottam Dev*. Other contemporary and later dramatists were also greatly influenced by it. Aswini Kumar was not an exception to it. He immediately followed suit by writing few historical dramas where he tried to paint the spirit of nationalism through the characters.

Spirit of nationalism gave birth to a fresh reformative attitude. Call was given to reform the prevalent social conditions and efforts were made to build an ideal society based on friendship, cooperation, and love. Protests were recorded in literature against untouchability, uncleanliness, casteism and lapses in character. The messages for these reformative attitudes were preached both in folk and elite plays. Aswini Kumar

wrote several plays where voices against superstitions, bad customs and social inequalities were raised. Other noted dramatist of the period, Kalicharan, also followed the same principle and tried to wipe out social injustice through his literary efforts.

During this period notable changes are marked in stage craft, characterisation, dialogue, music, conflict, sentiments and psycho-analysis etc. which played a vital role in producing a total effect ultimately leading to the success of a drama.

While writing, the dramatist is mainly guided by his own experience and vision. But he has also to bear in mind the taste and expectations of his audiences, because they are the patrons. Drama is a 'literature that walks before our eyes'. The success of this mobile literature is totally at the mercy of its audiences. Hence it is told 'drama's laws drama's patrons give'.

The dramatists of the period of Aswini Kumar were very much conscious about the stage-success of their creations. They were experimenting with various devices, which would impress the audiences quickly. Natural acting and straight expressions were introduced. For this purpose they thought about the time-factor of the traditional dramas. For the convenience of the audience the five acts of the dramas were first curtailed to four and even in some cases to two.

In traditional dramas long poetic-dialogues were in vogue and was accepted as an asset for the visual art. But for the changing taste of the audiences realistic, short dialogues were introduced keeping in view the social status, taste, behaviour of the character.

The musical side of the play was most neglected although the audiences were not averse to the musical performances. However, the songs written were mostly prosaic and dry. Most of the dramatists of this period had little poetic talent. Exception was dramatist Kalicharan who was a born-poet and composed charming songs which appealed to the audiences and became very popular. The dramatists during this period added some

modern techniques in their dramas, which added new dimensions to their creations. Successful contradiction is the power that adds movement to the dramatic performances. Conflict is divided into two parts, outer and inner. Till this period mostly outer conflict was used for the movement of the dramas. But the dramatists of this period designed inner conflict through the characters to change slow growth of the plot. Social conflict between the caste and religion and economic conflict between classes were introduced, and Gandhian and Marxian thoughts added new flavours to their creations. Political conflict through historical nationalism, mythological heroism, great idealism, sacrifices and patriotism were also introduced. As a result contemporary dramas like other branches of literature were provided with a fresh face-lift.

A powerful plot always appeals the audiences much. In the said period the dramatists applied a new technique in the treatment of plot. Subject matters were collected from different sources, for the three categories of dramas viz., mythological, historical and social written in the first phase. First, plots were brought directly from the Ramayan, the Mahabharat or the Puranas. Secondly, memorable incidents from Indian or Orissan history were dramatised, and lastly imaginary plots were deviced for social plays.

Beginning from the birth of Rama upto the banishment of Sita many memorable portions of Ramayan provided interesting topics for dramas. Dramatists like Ramsankar Ray, Radhamohan Rajendra Dev wrote plays, based on the Ramayan. Ramshankar and Padmanav Narayan Dev both collected materials from Mahabharat and wrote *Kansavadh*, *Dana Parikhya* and *Banadarpa Dalan*. Also Radhamohan Rajendra Dev wrote *Panchali Pattapaharan* based on the Mahabharat.

In the second phase, some dramatists collected materials from the epics. But considerable differences can be noticed in their approach. Even though the theme of Kalicharan's *Chakri* was collected from the Mahabharat, Chitraganda, its

heroine, appeared totally in a new form before the audience. The socio-psychological treatment added new life to the traditional characters. Historical plays based on heroic, emotional and idealistic characters impressed the audiences in their new look. The legend of Kanchi Kaveri where the heroic deeds of Gajapati Purusottam Dev has been described, is very popular in Orissa. Ramshankar who wrote his first play *Kanchi Kaveri* based on this theme instantly became famous. Subsequently Bhikari Charan, Godavarish and Kalicharn also wrote dramas on the same theme. But Kalicharan's *Abhijan* is the most successful play amongst these dramas for its novel approach, characterisation, conflict, songs and dialogues. The dramatists of this period could master over the technique to enliven even the dry and morbid topics of history.

Cover scene, an unique method deviced by Kalicharan to pacify the monotony of drama, was a valuable addition to stage craft of this period. From those days till to-day this method is applied by all the playwrights writing commercial plays. Before the introduction of this method drop came down after each scene and preparation for the next scene was taken up behind the curtain, and to engage audience, orchestra was utilised. Such interval after each scene was a tiresome affair for both the audience and the producer. Moreover this gave some sort of break to the concentration of the audience in following the subject matter.

Kalicharan first conceived sub-plots with side characters connected with the main theme. He presented them before the audience in a village or town road, forest or verandah and engaged the audiences in these scenes to prepare for the next part of the main theme of the drama. As a result once the curtain was raised it only came down after the completion of one act covering a number of scenes. The concentration of the audience remained intact. Thus both the audience and the producer were saved from a very boring situation.

As mentioned earlier the playwrights of the first phase tried

whole-heartedly to follow the western dramatic style. It is very difficult to trace aesthetic touch in pure imitation. An aesthetic combination of the poetic truth and life truth give out a memorable form. The creations of the first phase dramatists lacked this.

A change was due. Fortunately some powerful dramatists appeared thereafter who brought the changes required by the viewers. Thus modern Oriya drama made changes in its trend from this point of view. Henceforward besides materialistic approach, aesthetic approach become an integral part of dramatic creation. Aswini Kumar Ghose was the premier dramatist of this phase.

His involvement with this art form made him to write Oriya dramas from the second decade of the current century till his death. Apart from being a dramatist, he produced and directed plays even at a cost to himself. His intimate relationship with theatre movement of Orissa for about half a century circulated new blood in the veins of Oriya drama.

As has been mentioned elsewhere when Aswini Kumar entered the dramatic arena of Orissa, a change was due, and existing plays had failed to satisfy the viewers. As a genius, Aswini Kumar could easily feel the pulse of the audience and added new dimensions to Oriya drama. Ofcourse, he did not discard the tradition totally. But gradually he switched over to the style followed in western dramatic literature.

This totally changed the taste and outlook of the people. They gradually discarded the Sanskrit plays, where plot and characterisation occupied but a secondary place and no serious thinking was given to inventing plots or portraying characters. Instead plays of Shakespeare showed them an unseen path, which could satisfy their requirements if tracked.

In fact Aswini Kumar's childhood was spent in a cultural atmosphere. His maternal grand-father Gouri Shankar, the veteran journalist of later-nineteenth century, gathered all the elites of the then Orissa in that hall of his printing company

at Cuttack regularly. Apart from journalism, he was a man of many facets and he is remembered for his tireless efforts to fight for the cause of the Oriyas. Aswini Kumar was brought up under his affectionate care. It is still not known how Aswini Kumar developed an interest towards drama. As a teenager he started writing plays. In the beginning the form that he chose for dramatic writing was basically in the Sanskrit tradition. *Bhisma*, his first drama, was written in this form. But subsequently he switched over to the Shakespearean style.

Drama is a composite art. Different branches of art and literature are assimilated in it; poetry being the most important factor. Many famous dramatists of the world are notable poets also. Hence it is told, a dramatist who is not a poet, is only half-a-dramatist. Aswini Kumar was not a poet. Many dramatists of the period were not. Though the musical side of his dramas was weak, yet he could not be called half-a dramatist. To cover this lapse, he paid more attention to the construction of plot.

As an active and mobile branch of literature drama expects to have active characters which can only be found in the common mass. "Mritchhakatika", the famous Sanskrit drama, owes much of its success to such characters. Aswini Kumar, while selecting plots for his dramas mostly depended upon the contemporary society. This can be said about his mythological and historical plays also. Where he brought in contemporary touch, and made the plays relevant from the contemporary point of view.

There were other aspects too. For example well designed climax and suspense and a respect to unities, i.e., unity of time, place and action. He did not take long period for his action, and he was also conscious to arrange the dramatic incidents in nearly places. The dramatists of later period could not strictly follow these restrictions. They took long time (spread even upto three generations) and expanded the incidents to distant places.

The first modern Oriya drama *Babaji* was written in 1877.

Aswini Kumar came to the field after almost 38 years. During these 38 years, Oriya drama had not developed much. He injected new blood, and revived and revitalised it.

The significant aspect of Ghose was his total devotion in drama. For this he could forego good jobs and contented himself with a poorly paid school mastership. He got less money no doubt, but he got ample of time to devote to his first love, i.e., drama, and he was happy. He even mortgaged his own house and became a pauper only for this hobby. Yet he never complained. The sacrifice of Ghose will be recorded in golden letters for posterity in the history of Oriya drama. Modern Oriya drama owes much to this dramatist turned saint who offered everything for a noble cause.

II

Aswini Kumar—His life and work

Aswini Kumar was born as the eldest son to Akshyaya Kumar Ghose and Sundaramani Devi, in 1892.

His maternal grand father Gourishankar was the editor of *Utkal Deepika*, a pioneer weekly of Orissa. Ramshankar, the renowned dramatist, was his younger maternal grand father. Ray family was settled in Choudhury Bazar of Cuttack town, where Aswini Kumar spent most of his childhood days. The Rays were enlightened people and their house was a seat of culture. Many of the elites of the then Orissa were coming to the printing company established by Gouri Sankar and regular discussions were being taken up on various subjects like social problems, politics and culture including literature. It is quite natural that Aswini Kumar who spent his early childhood in such an atmosphere must have been influenced in later life to work for the enrichment of Oriya literature. His father Akshyaya Kumar had six sons and five daughters. His eldest son died as a child. Among the living five sons Aswini Kumar was the eldest. Others were Sharat Kumar, Ajay Kumar, Kartik Kumar and Asit Baran. Two of his brothers Kartik Kumar and Asit Baran are still alive. Out of the five daughters Sarojini, Kumudini, Kiranabala and Himanmayaee, only Himanmayee is alive.

As Akshyaya Kumar was serving as a Sirastadar at Cuttack, the early education of Aswini Kumar was completed at Cuttack. After passing F. A. (the present Intermediate) from Ravenshaw College, Cuttack, he went to Calcutta and was admitted to Vidyasagar College for further study. But due to ill health he returned to Cuttack and passed his B.A. from Ravenshaw

College, in 1914. His father expired in the same year for which he could not prosecute his post-graduate studies. Afterwards he passed M.A. in Mathematics as a private candidate from Patna University and was placed in the 2nd Class.

After the death of his father, the financial condition of his family deteriorated. In order to maintain a big family Aswini Kumar joined the Seminary School at Cuttack as an Assistant Teacher in 1916, for Rs. 60/- per month. After one year he joined the Pyari Mohan Academy, another high school of Cuttack. Later he joined as Headmaster of the Haranath High School, Calcutta. In the meantime he got an offer from Patna University to join as a Lecturer there. But due to some family problem and also due to his devotion for drama he did not accept the offer.

In 1915, while still a student, he wrote his first drama *Bhisma*, which was staged by Ravenshaw College Dramatic Society. During his teachership in the P. M. Academy, he wrote two more dramas, *Seoji & Sabitri. Sabitri* was staged by the staff and students of the said Academy, Nabakishore Bose, a teacher of the school, who was acting as Durdanta Singh, a character, performed his role so lively and touchingly that while the scene of putting the actor in jail was being performed a very curious incident occurred. Some students, from the core of their heart, shouted "Thank God! The villain is jailed. Now he cannot catch us while we are engaged in malpractice in the examination." The said teacher was always a vigilant invigilator in the examination hall.

Aswini Kumar was married to Kiranbala Ray, daughter of Brajamohan Ray of Cuttack, in 1916. Kiranbala, had no regular education, because female education was frowned upon in those days. Aswini Kumar had four sons and three daughters. Two of his sons died in their childhood. The other sons and all three daughters are still alive. Both the sons are settled outside Orissa. His wife Kiranbala died some time ago. Aswini Kumar's younger brother Kartik Kumar Ghose is also a renowned

dramatist.

From his early childhood Aswini Kumar developed three habits. He liked very much to play marbles. Also flying kites was one of his most favourite hobbies. The concentration thus gained was quite helpful while writing drama, he once told his younger brother Kartik Kumar. His third habit was staging dramas very often while his father was absent. He improvised a temporary stage in the 1st floor of his residence using bedsheets and enacted some scenes of a play.

As child Aswini was docile and was very much afraid of his father. Once while flying kite on the second floor of his residence. suddenly his father came. Aswini was so much perplexed that he jumped from the upper storey. Fortunately he was not seriously wounded. He was warned and asked not to fly kite hence forward. However, his attachment to stage gradually increased day by day. Accompanied by all brothers, Aswini Kumar regularly staged dramas in the upper storey of his residence. Ajay Kumar, one of his younger brothers, was the permanent instrumentalist.

Simple by nature, Ghose was never particular about his own food and dress. While at home he managed with two towels, one for covering the lower part of his body and the other for covering the upper part. While going outside he was putting on simply a dhoti and panjabi and never used any costly dress. He was satisfied with just whatever was available. He had some weakness for fried-rice.

Aswini Kumar was imparting private coaching to many students but without any fee. To strengthen his financial position Ghose started atleast three to four business but was not successful. His attachment towards drama perhaps did not allow him to concentrate in any other business.

As a student, he had special liking for Mathematics. While he was a student of 4th year class in Ravenshaw College his Principal Mr. Shaw was taking a mathematics-class in which Aswini Kumar was present. In that class the Principal could

not solve a particular problem. With due permission Aswini Kumar went to the black board and easily solved it. Principal Shaw was go pleased that he praised him everywhere.

There is nothing special to be mentioned about Aswini Kumar except his attachment and involvement with drama. It is perhaps due to the encouragement of his maternal grand father that he could gather the courage to play with 'fire' (as the form of a art was called in those days) and consequently he had to incur heavy financial loss in his later life.

In his personal life Aswini Kumar was a very soft spoken man, helpful in nature and gentle in behaviour. He was never harsh to anybody throughout his life.

He never took to drama as a profession. He was satisfied only in staging his dramas. In this connection a very interesting story may be narrated here. Once Annapurna Theatre decided to stage a play of a new playwright. The dramatist charged royalty for his work. The Manager who was not prepared for this told, "when reknowned dramatist like Aswini babu (popularly addressed as Dada) is not asking for anything for his script, why should a new entrant charge royalty?" At that moment Aswini Babu who was present there interfered. "I am not charging anything. This is my personal affairs. My younger brother Kartik is involved with the theatre party. But when the party is earning from the work of this dramatist why should the poor fellow be deprived of his share?" Thus he compelled the manager to offer some royalty to the playwright. From this incident we can judge the attitude of Aswini Kumar towards his co-writers. As stated earlier Banamali Pati, a Naib, started a professional theatre party at Balanga, a remote village in Puri district. Aswini Kumar was connected with this party as his dramas were staged regularly by this party. After the untimely death of Pati, the stage was closed and all the actors lost their jobs. Some of them met Aswini Kumar and appealed him to take over the party. At that time the financial condition of Aswini Kumar was not satisfactory. Still moved by the

pitiable condition of the theatre people he decided to purchase the party from the legal owner of late Pati. He had to mortgage his paternal house for this. This party was renamed as 'Banamali Art Theatre' (after the name of Banamali Pati, its founder) and started staging dramas. But this party was short lived and was closed ultimately due to mismanagement.

Aswini Kumar did not have a true business outlook. He was imaginative and idealistic in approach. For this he had to incur heavy financial loss for the theatre party.

He knew Pati since 1919, when his *Seojee* was being staged by the medical students at Cuttack. At that time there were only a few dramatists in Oriya. Mostly translations from other languages (mostly Bengali) were staged. Pati was highly impressed by the work of Aswini Kumar and introduced himself to him. This relation between an organiser and a great patron of theatrical art came as a boon for Oriya drama. The relationship continued till the death of Pati in 1928. By this time Aswini Kumar had already established himself as a dramatist. Drama had become a part and parcel of his life.

Before writing, he regularly took a stroll. While writing he was so engrossed in his work that he was forgetting everything totaliy, even himself. Once in such a situation, while writing *Kesharigunga*, he was so much occupied in the work that he could not know, when the night changed into dawn. He was never perplexed, never lost his temper. These were his great qualities.

It is told that Aswini Kumar after conceiving the plot was writing the last scene first. Then keeping in view the time limit he was dividing the plot into scenes and acts.

While travelling, he collected plots for his dramas. Once he visited the famous Loknath temple at Puri. Laxmi Narayan Patra, the manager of Annapurna Theatre Party, requested him to write a drama, based on the legends of Sri Loknath. He then collected materials from the priests of the said temple and wrote the entire drama within one month, which subsequently

became one of his most popular plays. Later, this also was made into a successful film.

Once while sitting in a shop he observed the nature of two young proprietor brothers, one was calm and quiet, and the other was fickle and quarrelsome. A drama entitled *Bhai Bhai* (brother) thus emerged within a short time based on these two characters. Like this being requested by the manager of Jagannath Theatre on a Thursday, Aswini Kumar wrote a mythological play *Chandaluni* which is still popular among the audience.

He wrote almost 41 full-fledged plays in Oriya, two plays in Bengali, four novels in Oriya, apart from two farces, some one-act plays, radio plays and gramophone record plays in Oriya. Aswini Kumar died in 1962 at the age of seventy. His pen was active for almost half a century.

For his notable contribution to Oriya drama, Aswini Kumar was first felicitated by the members of the Utkal Sahitya Samaj, Cuttack—a famous, old literary organisation of Orissa. Later on, he was honoured by the students of G. M. College Sambalpur and Orissa Sahitya Academy etc.

It is already pointed out how his first play *Bhishma* (1915) a mythological play based on Mahabharat, established him as a dramatist. The play had its shortcomings, but it appealed to the audience as they were tired of the stereotyped dramas of the earlier writers. The introduction of *Bhishma* set a new milestone. Atleast its novel and realistic approach was as per the taste of the audience. Aswini Kumar thus conquered the hearts of the audience from his first entrance into the dramatic arena. From 1915 till 1962, for nearly half a century he engaged his pen to create new and newer dramas, and come to occupy a very prominent position in the history of Oriya drama.

Aswini Kumar first wrote mythological plays but subsequently changed over to historical plays. It was a common trend at that time not only in Orissa, but throughout the country. The reason was obvious. The freedom struggle was in full swing

and the literature had to play its part. It was not an easy task at that time to raise one's voice against the powerful British rulers. Hence the intellectuals, more particularly the writers, decided to create a deep sense of patriotism, amongst the common mass. They took up historical themes to enliven the present with the heroic deeds of their fore-fathers. At first these works were not accepted favourably by the people, crushed under foreign rule. Law had already made them cowards. But gradually such type of work produced desired result. As in other parts of India, in Orissa too, some powerful litterateur like Fakir Mohan Senapati in prose; Radhanath Ray, Madhusudan Rao and Gangadhar Meher in poetry, narrated about the glorious past and the then pitiable condition of the motherland. The poets of Satyabadi group also started working in a planned way in this direction. Thus gradually, the voice of protest against the British tyranny, took its shape with the common mass. As it was forbidden under law the litterateurs utilised various branches of literature to enlighten the people about the dedication of the heroes of the bygone days like Rana Pratap, Sivajee, Chandragupta, Kharavela, Kapilendradev who dedicated their lives for the sacred cause of their motherland. Jyotirindranath Tagore and Dwijendra Lal Ray in Bengali, Jayshankar Prasad and Har Krishna Premi in Hindi, and Bhikari Charan and Godavarish in Oriya in the beginning started writing these type of plays.

The rulers did not bother at first to restrict the writer class as outwardly these literary works seemed to be very unharmful to them. But like a powerful drug these literary works started influencing the people inwardly. Thus the litterateur achieved their goal, without offending the ruler class. Aswini Kumar who entered the dramatic arena at this crucial juncture took no time to survey the entire atmosphere and immediately followed the path, created by his predecessors. He wrote *Bhishma*, *Srimandira*, *Chandaluni* to preach the message of national integration. His works *Seojee*, *Kalapahad*, *Govinda*

Vidyadhara, Kapilendra Dev, Konark carried messages for propagation of the cause of patriotism.

Just like mythological and historical dramas, his social plays was also equally powerful. Some such plays entitled *Chasa Jhia* (Farmer's daughter), *Sri Lokanath, Dukhe Sukhe* (through ups and downs) and *Abhinaya* (Acting) are still remembered with nostalgia by the drama' lôving people.

As stated earlier Aswini Kumar was a prolific writer. His dramas can be divided into three categories namely mythological, historical and social.

Mythological and devotional

Bhishma, Sabitri, Salbeg, Dasia Bauri, Tyagi Ram Das, Sri Mandira, Raghu Arakhit, Bandhu Mohanty, Chandaluni, Janaki, Sakhigopal, Satyanarayan.

Historical

Seojee, Kalapahad, Govinda Vidyadhar, Samaleswari, Utkala Gaurav, Konark, Kesari Ganga, Paikapua, Tajmahal, Odiajhia, Bhanja Bhunjanga, Kapilendradev, Bhubaneswar.

Social :

Hindu Ramani, Masterbabu, Irani, Bhai, Sri Lokanath, Chasa Jhia, Mamalatkar, Abhinay, Dukhe Sukhe, and *Kaidi.*

Aswini Kumar was deeply involved and fully dedicated to drama. After the closure of his Banamali Art Theatre (in which he staked all his valuable possessions), he virtually became a pauper. Then he was compelled to leave Orissa, went to Calcutta, and joined as a teacher in a school. There also be did not cut off his connections with drama and thus Oriya drama was actually enriched by his devoted endeavour.

III

Dramas—An Analysis

Aswini Kumar's first work as has been already said was a mythological drama *Bhishma*, which he wrote in 1915. This play was first staged by the students of Ravenshaw College, and later Banamali Pati, being impressed by its novelty, staged it continuously in his Radhakrishna Theatre. The young dramatist was encouraged by its success. *Bhishma* was actually the plinth of the dramatic monument, which Ghose subsequently built up.

As a beginner Ghose applied traditional methods in his first drama like 'Prastaban' (Prologue) and inclusion of Court-jester character, the vidushaka. *Bhisma*'s subject matter was collected from Mahabharat. Conditional marriage of Shantanu with Ganga, killing of seven sons by her, Bhishma's birth and Ganga's departure with the new born, meeting of the father and the son, Bhishma's great vow for Shantanu's marriage, and atleast Shantanu's death etc. have been narrated in this drama. The plot is artistically divided into five acts. In the first act Ganga kills her seven sons one by one and Shantanu, due to his earlier vow, could not do everything.

The fourth act is the climax of this drama, where Debabrata takes the great vow to remain bachelor throughout his life for which the title *Bhisma* is conferred on him.

The humour in this drama has been designed according to the traditional methods of Sanskrit dramas and Yatra-plays. Characters like Lambodar; his wife, and few other Brahmins provide humour. This may seem crude but in those days that was the accepted formula. Traditional plays were musical; there are atleast ten songs in this play. This was done taking into

account the prevalent tradition, where the audience often wanted songs and music in the drama. But Ghose was not a poet. All his songs therefore, lack the magical poetic touch, which enchants the listeners easily. For dialogue Ghose utilised 'blank-verse' in this drama. Ramshankar, his younger maternal grand-father, used blank verse in his first play *Kanch-Kaveri*. Ofcourse for mythological and historical plays dialogues designed through blank verse make powerful drama. But the dramatist must have also to be a talented poet which Ghose was not. Hence blank verse is not very effective in his first play *Bhisma*.

Bhisma is a tragedy. Its plot is closely knit. The dramatist has added some social scenes which have increased the value of the drama. Lastly it may safely be concluded that inspite of some of its weaknesses *Bhishma* is worthy of a potential first play.

His second play *Savitri* (1917) is noteworthy from one point of view. Conflict between religion and science has added a new dimension to this drama. The traditional metaphysical faith of India faced a set back during the second half of the 19th century at the advent of new ideas from the West. The newly educated mass strongly supported the causes of science whereas the common mass of this country still contented with their traditional belief. Hence a severe conflict in the social life shook the society. The traditionalists accused the western-education for this change, but the educated mass did not pay any attention to this. Contemporary literatures took up the cause and tried to find out a solution. In *Savitri* Aswini Kumar tried to bring a solution to such dispute. He declares in the 'Preface', that one cannot avoid religion and should not ignore science. Hence we are compelled to accept both. Both are necessary. Success cannot be attained through one only. For this purpose he conceived a character called 'Gajapati' (younger brother to Aswapati) who satirizes the religious faith of the king. But towards the end Gajapati is defeated. The traditional religious faith is established.

This is a mythological play the theme of which was collected from the Mahabharat. The drama was staged during the victory of the allied forces in the first world-war. This drama was written according to his previous formula.

In 1933, the dramatist wrote three devotional plays entitled *Salbeg*, *Dasia Bauri* and *Tyagi Ramdas*, taking subject matter from *Dardhyata Bhakti*, a popular 17 a century Oriya book, written by one Ramdas. There is nothing new to say about these dramas except that the devotional plays gained immense popularity and this encouraged the dramatist very much to explore more and more dimensions. *Dasia Bauri* is based on a very popular legend which is a tale of an untouchable (Harijan) Scheduled Caste called Dasia whose devotion for Lord Jagannath, brings the Lord from his famous jewel-seat (Ratna-Simhasan) to his devotee. It may be mentioned here that, Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Nation, started his famous revolution, to wipe out the sin of untouchability from this country many centuries after the story was narrated in *Dardhyata Bhakti*. However this drama corroborates Gandhi's idea.

Srimandira (1934) based on the construction of Jagannath Temple, was once upon a time very popular in Orissa. This is because Lord Jagannath occupies a very significant position in the heart of each and every Oriya and anything connected with him is respected by them. But one remarkable thing about this drama is, it was translated into Bengali as *Puri Mandir* and was staged in the famous 'Star Theatre' of Calcutta for sometimes. It is told that some renowned personalities of the Bengali stage, were present on one occasion and were highly pleased witnessing the drama. Later on during the early fifties, this theme was utilised by the dramatist in writing the screen play of *Sri Jagannath*, an Oriya film which also became very successful.

Aswini Kumar wrote two more dramas, called *Raghu Arakhit* (1937) and *Bandhu Mahanty* (1944), collecting materials from

Dardhyata Bhakti. The legends of these two devotees are still popular in Orissa. Needless to say that dramas based on this legends in those days were quite successful.

In 1946 the dramatist again wrote another play, which was based on a known mythological story written by Balaram Das, a Vaishnab poet of the 16th century. This was *Chandaluni* (The Scavenger-Woman). The torture of Laxmi (The goddess of fortune) by her husband Jagannath and his elder brother Balaram has been described here in a colourful language. In Orissa Thursdays are the days when goddess Laxmi is worshipped, specially in the month of Margasira (November-December), and she is worshipped with great devotion. On one such occasion while visiting the world in the early part of the morning Laxmi could not find arrangements for her welcome any where except in a scavenger's house. She entered her house and accepted the scavenger woman's offerings. Lord Balaram, the elder brother of Lord Jagannath saw Laxmi in the scavengers house and was very much annoyed. He immediately asked his younger brother not to allow Laxmi re-enter the temple, as Laxmi had already lost the sanctity of her caste, entering the house of an untouchable. Laxmi was banished from the temple. But before leaving, the goddess cursed both the brothers, and as a result the brothers could not get anything to eat or drink. Laxmi was residing near the sea-beach in a palacial building. Atlast hungry and thirsty both the brothers begged food in the building. Goddess Laxmi explained; that she is an outcast and belongs to the sweeper caste. If they accept food from her, then they may also become outcast. Balaram being hungry was compelled to accept food from Laxmi. Jaganath could recognize Laxmi and requested her to return to the temple. Laxmi before returning made a condition. She told if you promise that there will be no caste restriction in the temple, and Brahmin and Sweeper will eat the Mahaprasad from the same pot, then only I will return. Jagannath conceded and Laxmi came back to the temple.

The message of the story is clear, which was a severe centigation against the so called distinction between the 'touchable' and 'untouchable'—a clear social message, and Aswini Kumar took it as such.

Though based on Purana, the dialogues of this drama were conceived in a naturalistic manner. Thus the characters are nearer to contemporary society. The dramatist desired to have realistic atmosphere. Hence the celestial Gods here act like common human beings. Goddess Laxmi, driven out from her husband's place, weeps like a helpless lady. Balaram, the elder brother, acts like a conservative guardian of the family. At the outset, there is hardly any difference between a God and a human-being in this play. The songs were composed by Kishore Kavi, Shyam Sundar Das. Hence these are more charming than the songs of his other dramas.

Chandaluni got immense box office success due to its common appeal. Aswini Kumar wrote three mythological plays after this, namely *Janaki* (1952). *Sakhigopal* (1954) and *Satyanarayan* (1955). For *Janaki* he collected materials from the Ramayan and as mentioned by him, this drama was written to 'educate the common mass'. Aswini Kumar while writing this drama, had, besides the Ramayan, Bhababhuti's *Uttar Ramcharitam* and Dwijendralal Ray's *Sita* before him. Conflict between love and duty has been painted in this drama and the importance of duty has been accepted. Rama, the dutiful king of Ayodhya declares, "In this world the Raj Laxmi is the only friend of the king". This drama has been written in a realistic manner. The use of blank verse in the dialogue is matured and impressive. Humour has been brought up by the characters of Washerman and woman, and a crippled man, which is really enjoyable. The scene of helplessness of victorious Hanuman before Lav and Kusa creates laughter. The dramatist has given some local touch to the famous story of the Ramayan. This play is also very popular with the Oriya audience, like some of his other works.

Sakhigopal another of his works is also based on a popular legend of Orissa. Kavi Chandra Kali Charan also wrote a play on this legend called *Laxmi* (1938). The idol of Gopal was brought from Kanchi, as a booty with other materials by Gajpati Purushottam Dev during the 16th Century. The idol was first worshipped at Cuttack, then moved to Puri temple and finally brought to Satyabadi, a place about 20 km. from Puri. The lone Gopal found his paramour in Laxmi, the daughter of the priest of temple. Legend goes that the king constructed an idol of Radha and the day when the idol was placed near Gopal, Laxmi died.

Aswini Kumar painted Laxmi as a married woman, whereas in the legend she is unmarried. This play has many weak points for which it could not be popular.

Satyanarayan (1955) is based on materials collected from the theme of Pala, a folk poem written by Kavi Karna. The Palas are offshoots of communal harmony between the Hindus and the Muslims and are widely recited in Orissa. Its dramatised version was a success on the stage.

Aswini Kumar wrote his first mythological play in 1915 and during the subsequent forty years he contributed 12 more such plays, some of which achieved immense stage success.

The aim of the dramatist was to remove the 'theatricality' from the Oriya drama, and made it realistic as far as possible. He therefore, attributed human elements in Gods and Goddesses to make them real like.

Seojee (1918), his first historical drama, was written just within seven days and was staged by the students of the Cuttack Medical School. The material for this drama was collected from the history of the Rajputs. The fierce battle of the princes of Kanauj to win back their lost kingdom and their success has been described here. Its powerful plot combined with the spirit of nationalism gave this play a special flavour. The dramatic technique of Shakespeare has been adopted in this play.

At the primary stage Oriya dramatists were not very careful. about the introduction of characters and hence sometimes unwanted characters crept in weakening the plot. Aswini Kumar could trace out the defects and carefully selected all characters required for elucidation of the plot. In this first historical drama, the dramatist introduced the Shakespearean method of unity of opposites which was unknown to Oriya dramatists. Durjay Singh was conceived in opposition to Seojee. This very soon became a tradition in Oriya historical drama and other dramatists followed suit. Ghose did one more thing in his second historical book *Kalapahad*. He discarded the traditional Nandi, Prastavana and Nata Nati from the drama. Seojee was accepted by the audience and this strengthened the self-confidence of the dramatist.

The next historical play *Kalapahad* (1922) depicted one important and unforgettable chapter of Orissan history. This drama was first staged in the Star Theatre of Calcutta in 1920 by the Oriyas. It is told that famous Bengali stage actress Tarasundari was present during the performance and she blessed the male-actor Srikantha Rao playing the role of Dulia, the heroine.

Kalapahad the iconoclast, known as the destroyer of Hindu Culture, defeated the last independent Gajapati Mukunda Deva of Orissa in 1568, and thus Orissa was subdued by the Afgans. History records the cruelty of Kalapahad who killed Mukunda Dev in a treacherous manner and destroyed innumerable temples and other religious seats of Orissa. He even plundered the famous temple of Lord Jagannath and burnt the three idols of Jagannath, Balavadra and Subhadra. But the dramatist has dealt with the character in a sympathetic manner. In this drama, the writer has tried to unveil the actual reason of Kalapahad's cruelty.

This drama was first staged by the Radhakrushna Theatre and later on by the Annapurna Theatre continuously for a long time, as the writer added all the ingredients for its box-office

success. The heroic deeds of a patriot, devotion of two women towards their husband, affection of a mother towards her son, the heroism of a queen, cruelty, conspiracy, and murder, treachery, cheating, and many other aspects of this drama are responsible for its success. Treatment of sentiment (*Rasa*) is just superb in this drama. Seven out of the total nine *Rasas* have been successfully utilised in this drama. However critics have classified *Kalapahad* as a 'drama of emotion'.

Kalapahad is a trend-setter in modern Oriya historical drama. Aswini Kumar has mixed history, legend and imagination, and has prepared a touchy plot for the drama. There is a saying in Oriya in which the cruelty of the invader Kalapahad has been lively described : "Came Kalapahad who broke the steel barriers. Drank the water of the river Mahanadi. Queen of king Mukunda Dev served him diamonds in gold plates".

In 1921 Aswini Kumar wrote another historical play named *Govind Vidyadhar*. Vidhyadhar was a minister to Gajapati Prataprudra Dev of the solar dynasty. After the death of the Gajapati, Vidyadhar killed his sixteen sons one after another and occupied the throne. History of Orissa records him as a traitor. But the dramatist has given a different picture. He painted Vidyadhar as a great patriot. However, this play also gained immense popularity on the stage. It may be reminded here that the second decade of the current century was a very crucial period for Indian history as Mahatma Gandhi had started his 'non-Cooperation Movement' during this period and Indian mind was filled with a deep sense of patriotism at that time. Hence a drama like *Govinda Vidyadhar*, which had patriotic touch in it could easily influence the audience. *Samaleswari* (1925) and *Utkal Gaurav* (1927) are two of his ineffective dramas where less of history and more of imagination have been utilised. The youth of Orissa were deeply shocked to witness a play like *Utkal Gaurav* where the national character of the Oriyas had been derogately naratted. A strong voice of protest was raised against this. The playwright however

has given a long explanation in his preface. But the drama lacks the usual magical touch of the dramatist.

Konark (1927) is one of his most successful plays that has immortalised the dramatist. This tragic play has its origin in a popular legend prevalent in the coastal area of Orissa.

The famous sun temple of Konark was constructed by Narasingh Dev. It took long twelve years to be completed. But the main temple could not be completed due to its faulty design. Out of disgust the king fixed a time limit and warned the 1200 workers that if they failed to complete the construction within the stipulated time, all of them would be beheaded. The head-sculptor Bishu Maharana was a fix. In the meantime, his twelve year old son Dharmapada who was in his mother's womb when the sculptor left home to work for the temple came to meet his father. Bishu met him for the first time. Dharmapada could come to know the entire story from his father. As he was a skilled worker he took permission of his father and within a short time completed the temple. Seeing that the work was done by a boy of 12, all other sculptors were perplexed as they thought they would be humiliated by the king for their inability to complete the temple. Hence all of them went to Bishu Maharana and asked to kill his only son, 'Whether you care for twelve hundred sculptors or your son?' they wanted to know. Dharmapada after knowing everything came to the rescue of his father. He climbed to the top of the temple, jumped down to the sea and killed himself.

The drama is divided into three acts. The first act deals with the training of Dharmapada and his departure to the temple site at Chandra Bhaga. In the second act the completion of the temple and Dharmapada's suicide has been narrated and in the third act the repentance of Narasingh Dev, has been described. The Gajapati is deeply moved by the sacrifice of a promising young boy who would have been a great sculptor one day. The emotional king thinks the Sun-temple as the graveyard of art and architecture. He declares, "This is not

the Konark of my dreams. This is just constructed out of dust and mud. Its beauty is false; its Gods and Goddesses are powerless. My Konark is elsewhere."

There were various reasons for the popularity of the drama. The emotional topic appealed to the audience very much. Moreover the powerful acting of late Balai Chandra Bannerjee in the role of Bishu Maharānā, and of Sri Kashinath Sahu as Dharmapada created a history in acting for all time to come. *Konark* is a landmark in the history of Oriya drama.

Keshari Ganga (1927) has less of history and more of legend in it. The theme of the play is based on a Kavya—*Nandi Keshari* written by Radhanath Ray. But as usual Aswini Kumar changed the plot of the legend. Nandika, daughter of Survana Keshari, the last king of the Keshari dynasty, has been painted as a love-stricken young lady by the poet. But Aswini Kumar made her a great patriot who sacrificed herself to save the Oriya nation from destruction.

Paikpua (1933), *Tajmahal* (1933) and *Bhanja-Bhujanga* (1936) made no powerful impact upon the audience. The historical elements utilised in these dramas are negligible.

Kapilendra Dev (1953), was first staged by the Annapurna Theatre ('A' Group) as *Abhisek* (Coronation). Kapilendra was the founder of Solar dynasty in Orissa and from being a poor boy he rose to be the emperor of Orissa. The play narrates the story of this fortunate boy.

The dialogue of the play is realistic. The drama is divided into two parts. In the first part the gradual deterioration of Bhanu Ganga (the last king of Ganga dynasty) and advent of Kapilendra has been described, and the other part deals with the downfall of Bhanuganga and the coronation of Kapilendra. As this drama was staged by a professional party, the dramatist had to remember the requirements of the general audience. Hence there is a love story in which Kapilendra and his lady-love are united ultimately. Young Kapila had a faithful fiend called Kasia. Kapila promised to appoint him

as his minister, if at any time he would become a king. Actually when Kapilendra became a king, he sent for his friend and appointed him as his minister. There is a popular saying in Orissa, which says "Will Kasia and Kapila ever meet?" The root lies here. Kasia and Kapila actually met each other and the dramatist artistically depicted the incident which appealed to the audience.

Bhubaneswar (1962) is a play, the story of which is related to mythology, history and contemporary time. In order to show the evolution of Bhubaneswar (the present Capital of Orissa), the dramatist has tried to establish a link between the past, present, and future. The play is divided into four poetic parts called, 'Abahan' (Invocation), 'Parikalpana' (Planning), 'Parinati' (Final stage) and 'Vikash' (Development). Yajati Keshari, the founder of Keshari Dynasty in Orissa, first of all dreamt to have his capital at Ekamra (the present Bhubaneswar). Historical evidences, therefore, from Yajati Keshari has been depicted in this play.

During a period of 47 years (1915-1962), the dramatist wrote 13 historical plays. In most of these works he took the skeleton from history and added flesh and blood to it from his own imagination. At least in each case he analysed from humanitarian point of view, applying all modern techniques. Hence his historical characters have acquired social importance in the present context. After writing a number of mythological and historical plays Aswini Kumar started experimenting in social themes. He could visualise the change of taste in the audience. There was great demand for social plays. The then society was filled with superstitions and other vices. He desired to utilise this media of entertainment to reform the society through mass education.

His first social play *Hindu Ramani* (1937, Hindu Woman) deals with devotion of a wife towards husband along with her service, sacrifice and kindness. The role of woman, her dedication with a view to solve various problems which bring

happiness for the family are effectively pictured in this work. The dramatist shows two women character's Sumati and Kumudini whose devotions have changed two men, Harihar and Girindra. The darker side of the women has also been shown through Iliya and Mohini characters. Besides the dramatist has also dealt with the problem of untouchability and widow-marriage etc. For the box-office success commercial scenes like murder, theft, rape, conspiracy etc. have been added. The dialogues are realistic, and inspite of some minus points this is a well-made play.

In the same year, i.e., 1937 *Masterbabu* was written and staged by the dramatist, where conflict between Gandhism and the so-called modernism has been successfully presented. Mahesh, the hero of this play, is a teacher and his contact with Hena, a prostitute, totally changes the philosophy of his life. He becomes addicted to wine and leaves his wife. But finally the devotion of his wife changes him and the family lives happily. This clicked, on the stage.

Irani (1937), the third drama in the same year, is a new experiment against casteism. The message of friendship and love has been delivered through this drama which deals with a story based on love between a Hindu youth Ishak and a nomadic young girl Irani and their unhappy conjugal life. The inner conflict of the Iranian girl, has been painted in a masterly manner. The dream of a casteless society by the dramatist was something new in the then conservative society. But in the concluding scene, Irani, leaving her dear husband and her child and going away with an Iranian men, a representative of her own community, may appear natural but it affected the main connection of the play.

Bhai (1924, Brother) is the story of two brothers, one of whom is highly educated and the other is not. The second brother lives in a village, cultivates his field, whereas the educated brother is an officer in the town. When the anglicised wife of the educated brother divorces him, the uneducated

brother intervenes and the broken family is reunited.

In this play the darker side of the western culture is shown in contrast to the traditional peaceful village culture. Both urban and rural characters are presented in a lively way. Dialogues for both the sets are realistic.

Sri Lokanath (1946) is one of Aswini Kumar's most successful plays which has subsequently been filmed. The plot of the play is an artistic combination of social and supernatural elements. Dr. Shivanath is an atheist and his wife Parvati is just the opposite in nature. Due to God Lokanath's grace the couple is blessed with a son. Before the birth of the child, Tima, doctor's younger brother, takes a vow to present a gold snake to Lord Shiva if his brother is blessed with a son. But due to unavoidable circumstances he fails to fulfil his promise. God's wrath falls upon the helpless couple and their son is bitten by a snake. The dead body of the child is thrown away in the cremation ground. The child who is actually not dead is rescued by a nomadic tribe and is adopted by one highly placed officer. Ultimately after long interval the doctor gets back his son and the drama ends with a sweet union.

The story has ample dramatic elements in it. The message is that all the events are controlled by supernatural power. The rural scenes are very much lively.

Chasa-Jhia (1946, A Farmer's daughter) is a colourful feather in the crown of the dramatist. Charming and beautiful rural pictures presented in this play are rare in Oriya literature. This was staged by Annapurna Theatre with packed house for months together. The drama was written and staged immediately after the closure of the 2nd world war, which disturbed the rural life. This has been lively painted in this drama.

Family-feud due to ego-clash among the female folks and its ultimate results have been depicted here. Bhima Padhan was a rural farmer, who had three married sons. Till his death the family lived jointly. His two elder sons joined war to earn money. The youngest one remained in the village and looked

after the fields. In the meantime a village tout entered the scene and instigated the spirited 2nd daughter-in-law successfully to get separated from the younger brother's family. Dama's (younger son) family found shelter with the village post master—a Gandhian. Ultimately the brothers were united and the minds of the female folks also changed.

The dialogues of this drama are realistic. The humour presented is enjoyable and effective. The village yatrawalla, a character of this play created for humour, is remembered even now by those who saw the play. The total rural pictures in this drama made the aesthetic side simply superb 'Chasa-Jhia' has got a permanent place in Oriya social plays.

Mamlatkar (The Headman, 1946) is just an extension of his previous drama *Bhai*. It is the tale of a prodigal son who revolts against his family, marries as per his own choice, then drives his wife and finally again accepts her. In addition the utopian 'Ramrajya' as conceived by Mahatma Gandhi also finds place in this play.

Abhinay (Acting, 1953) was first written in Bengali, and its name was *Abhinay Band*. Later it was translated by the dramatist and staged by the Police Recreation Club, Cuttack. A very important problem regarding marriage has been put forward in this play. For some time the dramatist had been thinking seriously about the importance of marriage in a man's life, so that in *Bhai* the hero Shiva Choudhury asked the question to himself. "Is marriage a burden?" The heroine of *Abhinay* in the beginning gives a faulty solution quoting Bernand Shaw, "Marriage is a legalised prostitution". But after gaining some experience she corrects herself and admits the sanctity of marriage and finally declares that "Marriage is a legalised protection". Manisha is married to Mr. Das, a worthless person who actually married her for her wealth. Once that is gained he casts his eyes elsewhere. Chhanda, Manisha's friend, now becomes his target. Mr. Chatpati, Manisha's well wisher, tries his level best to save Manisha. He takes away

Chhanda from Mr. Das and enraged Das kills her, and Chatpati declares himself to be the murderer. Manisha dies and her place is taken up by another girl Geeta. Das changes.

As Chatpati in his subconscious deeply attached to Manisha he tries his level best to save her family from destruction. Analysis of human mind in this play is unique and one can feel the mature touch of an expert hand throughout the play.

Dukhe-Sukhe (Through Ups and Downs, 1954) another social drama was first staged by the employees of the settlement office. The theme of this play was conflict and peaceful co-existence between the have's and the haven'ts. It is a family drama. The writer declares—"On one side there are rich people and on the other side there are the poor. The middle class is in between, as if between dream and a reality". He further thinks, "Has this middle-class got its own existence"? The answer to this question can be found in the last scene of the drama where amidst all the conspiracies of the rich, and antagonism of fate, this class survives with self respect. This drama draws the sympathetic attention of the audience due to its elements of pathos. The play deals with the story of a lower middle class family, Sadhu Charan, a low paid clerk, has a family which consists of his wife and a son. The son Upamanyu, suffers from T.B. An idealistic teacher Bholanath, helps this family and treats Upamanyu. Upamanyu is cured but his mother dies. Then everything becomes normal. Sadhu Charan's family now sets out for a new journey. This emotional topic has ample of dramatic elements in it. Inspite of several weaknesses this was liked by the audience.

In 1957, in his ripe age, the dramatist decided to have some new experiments and hence collecting materials from Dostoyevsky's novel *Crime and Punishment* he wrote his last social drama *Kaidi*. Here the dramatist proves that nobody is a born culprit. Only circumstances turn a human being an accused. Inside the cruel heart of an accused, there is always a tender and affectionate heart. This is the first crime drama in Oriya.

The story goes like this. Khagen and Gajen are two intimate friends. Gajen is idealistic and hence un-successful in maintaining his family, Khagen tries to help him and develops a soft corner towards Kamini, wife of Gajen. Gajen leaves his family and his book is published under Khagen's name. Khagen marries Kamini. Gajen sends a telegram declaring his death. While Kamini is trying to destroy the telegram Khagen enters and at the spur of the moment kills Kamini. Thus Khagen becomes a prisoner.

The drama has a powerful plot like all other works of the dramatist. The picture of triangular love between Gajen, Khagen and Kamini—is artistically designed. The dialogues of this work are fitted to the characters. The promise of this drama is very clear. The dramatist has tried to explain that the subconscious state of a human being always controls his consciousness. The misdeeds of an accused is not the result of a normal state of mind. Circumstances also play a vital role in it. Hence to punish an accused is not socially justified. Purgative methods may be applied to destroy the root of crime for the so called culprits. The dramatist has tried to justify this theory through two of his characters—Gajen and Khagen.

During those twenty-years (1937-1957) Aswini Kumar wrote 10 social dramas. His social motivations can be marked even in his mythological and historical plays. Experimenting with the social scenes in the mythological and historical dramas he prepared himself to write full-fledged social dramas. The changing society, especially the quick changes in the political scene of the country changed the taste of the audience and put an end to mythological and historical plays. The audience were eager to witness their own reflections in any sort of literary work, instead of being satisfied with the supernatural elements of the mythology and emotional factors of history. Moreover Kalicharan Pattanaik, Aswini Kumar's famous contemporary started writing social plays which changed the taste of the audience. Therefore Aswini Kumar decided to

change his track.

Through his social plays the dramatist portrayed different social problems and suggested solutions. He maintained that change of heart only can lead the society towards a better prospect. This was warmly welcomed by his audience. Service, sacrifice and kindness, these qualities can solve acute social problems he opined. He dreamt about a total society which was based primarily on friendship and love. He invoked 'Satya' (Truth) through 'Siva' (Bliss) and tried to reach 'Sundara' (Beauty).

Aswini Kumar wrote two farces, namely *Reformed Lady* and *Premika Chatra* (A Student Lover). *Maluni* (the Gardener Woman) is one of his radio plays, *Suna Bhauja* (the Good Sister-in-Law) is his one-act play where a long preface has been added after Bernard Shaw. Besides he also wrote many scripts for the gramophone records which made him popular throughout Orissa.

IV

Novels—A Bird's Eye view

Not many people who keep interest in literature know that Aswini Kumar also wrote novels. Four of his novels were published, in which the writer dealt with the social conditions of Orissa : degradation of human values, inequalities between the classes, pitiable conditions of the poverty striken people and peaceful co-existence among opposing groups in the society have become the subject matters of his novels. His treatment as regards the humanitarian approach in novels is unique. They convey his dreams about a classless and casteless society without any difference of sorrow. More particularly his deep feelings for the improvement of the status of women and concern for their education and social independence, can also be seen in his novels.

Budha Chacha (Old Uncle), his first novel, was published in 1914, and the story relates to the noble character of an old man who had dedicated his own life, to save the honour of a woman. The heroine Bimala was a widow. After the death of her husband, she stayed with her father. The family maintained good relation with a Muslim family in the neighbourhood. Hanif was the head of the Muslim family and was the affectionate old-uncle (Budha chacha) of Bimala. Her relation with Nafar, Hanif's son was cordial, as both Nafar and Bimala were child-hood friends. But as time passed, the mentality of Nafar also changed. He decided to have illicit relation with Bimala and if required he was also prepared to apply force for this. Once while the father of Bimala was absent, Nafar entered Bimala's house forcefully and took her to a nearby forest. After regaining her senses in the forest Bimala saw Nafar and his friends.

At first she was perplexed and tried to coax Nafar to release her. But when her efforts failed, she became hostile. Mad with rage she killed one of the young fellows and was finally killed by the bloody rapists. In this crucial moment Hanif entered the scene. He was simply dumb-founded to witness such a heinous scene. Bimala's pitiable death moved him deeply. Hanif liked Bimala as his own daughter, he was her darling 'chacha' (uncle). He was determined to punish the miscreants. Finally he killed his own son Nafar and avenged the death of his helpless and poor niece Bimala.

As an intellectual, Aswini Kumar well understood that the upliftment of the country totally depended upon the united strength of the Hindus and the Muslims. Unless and until these two groups are settled peacefully side by side the country cannot prosper. Besides, the novelist has expressed his deep concern over the degradation of human values and strongly feels that noble characters like Hanif can only save the society from total destruction. In addition, the novelist has also thrown light upon the pitiable condition of a child-widow and has tried earnestly for the upliftment of the woman-folk. Thus here in this novel, the writer dreams about a society, where people live in peace and harmony with malice towards none and love for everybody. As a novelist Aswini Kumar was conscious of his own limitations. He admits in the 'Preface', that the novel must have had some weak points. But as 'sacred ideas' were depicted in this work, and as a noble character, Old Uncle, was the central figure of this novel, to set a glaring example before the readers and to promote communal harmony, the novel was published.

However, the novel could not be popular, perhaps, because of its stiff language and also for its serious subject matter. Yet about seventy-seven years ago to dream about Hindu-Muslim unity was not a matter of joke.

His second novel *Channabala* (Peanut Seller) was published in 1929. In this work the writer has put stress upon eternal

human values. The subject matter of the novel is slight. The sympathetic novelist has taken a road-side poor fellow as his hero. He has proved that nobility is a human quality which can be more expected from the illiterate poor people. Their feet may be dusty, but their hearts are not rusty, the novelist concludes.

The peanut-seller sits near Gola Dighi of Calcutta and sells peanuts mostly to the juvenile buyers. A teenager regularly buys peanuts from the seller and the poor seller is reminded of his own child whom he has left in his home and has not seen him for a long time. His struggle for survival has not given him any opportunity to meet his family. The poor man is filled with nostalgia and thinks about his own child again and again and forgets to sell peanuts.

By the by the novelist has mentioned about a Kabuliwala—the central character of the famous short story of Rabindranath—who under the same circumstances struggled hard in Calcutta and thought about his darling child whom he had left in far of away Kabul. The novelist who has been influenced by this short story, has tried to convince his readers that human emotion knows no barrier, or country time or people. It is the same with everybody.

The pea-nut seller is dear to everybody. His cordial and affectionate behaviour, wins over all the buyers. They also like him. Immense love for humanity is his motto. One day this road-side seller dies. The entire city mourns his death. Huge crowd joins his funeral with heavy heart. They bid him a touchy farewell. His simplicity, love and affection for everybody made him immortal.

The subject matter of this novel is limited in scope. The main plot is woven tightly around the central character—the peanut-seller. Humanism is the central idea, that is conveyed through selected characters. The novelist has introduced a teenager to convey this message, who was a regular customer of the pea-nut seller, and who inspired all the city-dwellers

to mourn for the poor man.

The novelist has also thrown light on the peculiar human behaviour which according to him is the real cause of one's suffering. The tragedy of Othelo is not Desdemona, he says, but his own weakness—lack of self-confidence. Similarly the tragedy of the contemporary society is not total dependence on science or technology but lack of self-respect, he adds. Aswini Kumar, as a true humanist, points out here towards the quick degradation of human values which needs immediate attention. Unless suitable steps are taken to check this, the society is sure to come to dust, he opines.

It is clear that, the changed condition of morality worried him. The pea-nut seller is created thus as a symbol of love and affection only to preach morality. A faithful picture of the growing social evil and the novelist's earnest desire to eradicate the same has been put forth in this novel. Socially conscious, the writer wanted to reflect the contemporary society through his novels.

Nari (Woman), his third novel, is also dedicated to 'humanity'. In this work, Aswini Kumar has shown the conflict between the rural and the urban culture. Two women, one from the rural and the other from the urban area, play all important roles in this novel. Mandara, the woman from the rural area, is deeply attached to her husband. She is religious and spends much of her time in worshipping her innumerable deities. Her endurance, simplicity and affectionate behaviour project her as a true replica of Indian womanhood. The urban woman Sundari is beautiful, accomplished, modern in outlook and has a magnetic power to attract people towards her. Mandara is married to Divakar, and Sundari is married to Jay Narayan. Once Divakar praises Sundari before Mandara. Mandara is worried, and notes the existence of a second woman in her husband's life. She passes many sleepless nights in deep mental agony. Atlast she decides to change the mind of her husband through sorcery. She contacts Panua's mother and Gundicha,

and asks them to find a person well-versed in witchcraft. Ultimately this ends in a comical situation.

Superstitious beliefs and blind faiths in ghosts, witches and other supernatural agencies were rampant in those days. Aswini Kumar fought tooth and nail against these harmful beliefs. Not only in this novel, but in some of his dramas too, he raised his voice against superstition. This apart, he also describes the habits and customs, food and clothing of the contemporary society. Moreover, he strongly criticises the inclination of the younger generation towards western culture. It has been mentioned elsewhere how Aswini Kumar was a great propagator of his own culture. A slight deviation in this regard pains him a lot. This novel deals with the same old story of the eternal love triangle, conflict between two woman and a man. The treatment of plot is artistic. The novelist has shown quite masterly craftsmanship in word-coinage. Especially in using idioms and phrases and colloquial words he shows his deep interest in rural culture.

His fourth novel *Mukti* (Freedom) deals with the oppressions of the landlords and the consequent suffering of people. The women are the simple and innocent people are tortured for nothing, their earthly belongings are taken away and their houses are set on fire. On the other hand the landlords spend their time in great luxury. Dhulia is a poor snake-charmer. He has a daughter called Manua. He has also adopted another child, a boy, called Satia. Satia and Manua, being brought up together, develop some weaknesses towards each other. But in the meanwhile a second character enters the scene. He is Bidyut Kumar the landlord's son. He is charmed by the beauty of Manua and tries with all his powers to remove away Satis from his path. He abducts Manua and tries to rape her. But Manua is not weak like an ordinary girl. She resists bravely and protects herself. Ultimately both the lovers are united.

The novelist has used symbolic names for his hero, heroine and villain in this novel. Manua suggests mind, Satia truth,

and Bidyut is suggestive of fickleness. Mind denounces sin and follows the truth. Bidyut is discarded and Manua embraces Satia. This was a successful novel and was later dramatised and staged by the Annapurna Group.

Before concluding it can be said that as a novelist Aswini Kumar was not successful. There are various reasons for this. Basically he was a dramatist and was not well-verse with the techniques of novel.

But as a socially conscious writer, he had a vivid knowledge about contemporary Oriya society. He tried to portray it in his works whenever he got an opportunity. The society was rapidly changing during his time. Western education was quickly diversing the educated mass to new professions and services. These changes brought some problems to the society with which the local people were not acquainted. In fact not only Aswini Kumar, but almost all the contemporary writers took up the challenge and analysed these problems in their writings. Aswini Kumar's novels deal with these problems and threw light to give a new facelift to the society.

V

Aswini Kumar—A Milestone in Oriya Drama

One can see two trends in the dramas of Aswini Kumar. One is idealism, and the other nationalism. 'I am an Oriya, Orissa is my motherland', this spirit is maintained in almost all his dramas. In addition in most of his dramas he tried to project one or other of his idealistic beliefs. This affected his sense of realism to some extent. But on the whole they provided a grand design to all that he wrote.

Similarly Ghose's superiority in character paintings and arrangement of incidents may also be noted. His sharp sense of observance has penetrated deeply into each and every character he came across. The roadside folk-player, the tilling farmer, the working Peshkar, in fact every type of character, could receive proper attention of the playwright. Historical characters are adorned with heroism and valour, revengefulness and forgiveness, crookedness and kindness. Kalapahad was a lively image of revengefulness, Govinda Vidyadhar a photograph of endurance, Hindu wife Sumati sacrificed herself for the happiness of her husband, frivolous and selfish Chhanda snatched away the husband of her close friend Manisha and again rejected him on the behest of Mr. Chatpati, farmer's daughter Shami forgot her own status being allured by money. Thus the entire creative world of Aswini Kumar was filled with colourful characters, bearing the above qualities. As the playwright had direct access to these lively characters, he depicted their hopes and expectations, desire and lust in a masterly manner. He was equally successful in depicting both sophisticated and rural characters.

The powerful current of strong nationalism which started flowing in this country towards the 2nd half of the 19th century influenced playwrights like Ramshankar, Bhikari Charan, Biravikram and Godabarish, all predecessors of Aswini Kumar. These playwrights had selected historical characters to preach patriotism in a veiled manner. Aswini Kumar made this trend clearer and straight-forward in his works. One can find this in *Odia Jhia* (Daughter of an Oriya), *Bhanja Bhujanga*, *Seojee*, *Keshariganga*, *Bhisma*, *Srimandira* and *Chandaluni* etc.

Aswini Kumar was a lover of humanity. He firmly believed that every human being is a combination of good and bad. It is very difficult to trace a flawless human being in this world. "One is to accept human being as he is", he used to say, and painted all his characters with this belief. Beginning from Kalapahada, prisoner Khagen till Bhisma and Ratin everywhere his belief about man's character could be seen. Ofcourse there are few traditional and positive good characters in his dramas. But these are exceptions.

In Oriya historical plays prior to Aswini Kumar, Bhikari Charan actually was a pioneer. *Kanchi Kavery* of Ramshankar, one of the first modern Oriya dramas was not actually a work based on history in true sense. Through his twelve historical plays Aswini Kumar actually set a new trend, much more than what Bhikari Charan did. Oriya historical drama got a new tradition. Dry materials from history became colourful and enjoyable because of the magic touch of the playwright. He collected facts from history, gave philosophical touch to it, and presented the same to the audience. Thus dry matters of history were converted into memorable literary works.

In those days western plays were being classified into two groups—Romantic and Classic. In classical plays three unities (unity of time, place and action) were maintained throughout. Introduction of sub-plots inside the main plot were avoided in these types of dramas as far as possible. Action, mostly occurring in one day, was conceived and narrated through some

characters. Incidents occurring in one place, or its nearby places were narrated mainly. The maximum time limit of these incidents was twelve to twenty four hours. Besides the Greek dramatists, French dramatist Racin (17th Century) wrote dramas in this style. But British dramatists of Elizabethan period, such as Marlow, Shakespeare, conceived many sub-plots inside the main plots of their dramas. Gradually this style became more popular and three unities virtually discarded from drama.

In modern Oriya literature which took its shape in the middle of the 19th Century Romantic trend found its place from the beginning. Radhanath, Fakir Mohan, Madhusudan, Nanda Kishore and Gangadhar—all modern writers accepted this style and created their immortal works. One can find a touch of deep patriotism in Radhanath's *Mahayatra* and other Kavyas. This can safely be classified as 'National Romanticism'. Aswini Kumar was no exception. He accepted this general trend in his creations. In his plays one can find the following points of the romantic trends : (a) Romantic subjectiveness—a powerful agony to express one's own experience through literature; (b) outburst of powerful emotion recollected through imagination; (c) deep thinking—a deep spiritual agony to know the mystery of the creation; (d) preaching the gospel of universal brother-hood, equality, friendship and (e) a deep longing for independence through literature.

It has been already pointed out how Aswini Kumar has tried to rejuvenate the spirit of nationalism under the veil of historical plots. One can see the spark of nationalism in many of his plays. Thus in *Kalapahada* emperor Akbar has strongly criticised the attitude of attacking and plundering other's territory for one's own luxury. In the same drama Gajapati Mukunda Deva has tried to revitalise the Oriya soldiers, narrating before them their past glory, heroic deeds and valours. In *Govinda Vidyadhar*, a mother comes out against her wayward son and instigates the people to throw him out from the royal throne, and drive him away from the country. Here personal

relationship has been sacrificed at the altar of patriotism.

In his mythological plays too the dramatist has tried earnestly to place the nation in a spiritual threshold. In *Chandaluni* he has preached against superstitions. However, his sole idea was to acquaint the nation with its own metaphysical base and thus to arouse a sense of self-respect amongst the Oriya people. Also he earnestly desired to root·out all the evils of the casteism and inequality of sexes. The main aim was to create healthy atmosphere inside the world and clear the way for birth of a new nation full of self-confidence and power.

For this, he strongly believed that a strong spiritual atmosphere is essential in the country. He had strong faith on God. He further believed that, each and every problem of the society would be solved easily if its people have strong spiritual inclination. He maintained that unless and until the condition of individuals in the society is improved, the total development of a nation is not possible. This is possible if peaceful co-existence is practised between the 'Have's' and the 'Haven't's. As an imaginative writer, he conceived an 'utopia'. He always tried to take his audience to an imaginary world where there would be no sorrow and sufferings. In *Dukhe Sukhe* (Through Sorrows and Joys), he has changed the hearts of the oppressive class. The characters representing this class ultimately have come to the rescue of the 'Haven't's and the differences between the two classes have disappeared. In another drama *Master Babu*, the prostitute sacrifices her life for a noble cause. In *Bhai* (Brother) a subordinate officer sales all his worldly possessions to save his superior from charges of misappropriation. Whether things like this actually happen in this world or not is immaterial here. But the dramatist earnestly desires that this should happen everywhere.

As stated earlier, Aswini Kumar utilised history, to arouse patriotic feelings amongst his countrymen. For this purpose, he moulded history whereever necessary. As a creator, he had likely to change the facts of history to make his message

effective. Bengali dramatist D. L. Ray had changed the then known facts of history. The bad characters were painted differently. For example 'Siraj', till then known for his tyranny and cruelty appeared as a true patriot before the audience. Aswini Kumar was very much impressed by this method and applied the same in his own plays. Thus the prodigal tyrant Kalapahad, murderer and traitor·Govinda Vidyadhar, appeared in a totally changed form on the stage which was never objected to by the audience also. In many cases todays legends are accepted as tomorrow's history. However, a historical drama is not history. There is nothing to comment, if the playwright makes changes in the facts of history for artistic purposes, which both D. L. Roy and Aswini Kumar did.

Aswini Kumar emerged as a dramatist in the second phase of Oriya drama. In the first phase (1877-1920) the dramatists were much influenced by English dramas. Aswini Kumar's interest was to be independent of these influences and to build a new path for Oriya drama. This he did and Oriya plays got a fresh look. Subsequently Kavichandra Kalicharan, another dramatist of repute, built upon the incentive provided by Ghose and then Oriya drama emerged stronger and reder.

The Maharaja of Jeypore, Vikrama Dev Verma, was much impressed by his historical works such as *Seojee* and *Kalapahada* and wanted to translate them into Telugu. When asked about the remuneration, the dramatist would expect, Aswini Babu simply said that he was only interested about the translation of his works, not money. It is needless to mention here that permission for translation was given by him. But the incident shows the writer's involvement and interest in drama and dramatic literature.

With Aswini Kumar, Oriya drama achieved a new strength in plot construction, characterization and language. His plays, inspite of occasional exaggerations artificialities and element of melodrama are carried through by their tremendous emotional and dramatic impacts. The dramatist was well connected with

atleast two professional stages of Orissa. One was Radhakrushna Theatre of Balanga, for which he wrote plays regularly till the death of its proprietor Banamali Pati. He was also associated with another stage viz. Annapurna Theatre for whom also he wrote plays regularly. In addition he was always eager to help amateur parties whatsoever whenever they needed such help. He had good relation with Kavichandra Kalicharan Pattanaik, his contemporary and a great stalwart of Oriya drama who first owned 'Sakhigopal Natya Sangha' a professional party staging many leelas, and subsequently, established one famous 'Orissa Theatre' (1939). Both these parties were patronised by Aswini Kumar. Very often Kalicharan would come to his beloved 'Dada' (as he was affectionately called by Kalicharan) and discuss his problems with him. It is interesting to note that both the dramatists wrote dramas more or less on the same plots. The plots of Aswini Babu's *Sakhigopal* and *Odia Jhia* were later adopted by Kalicharan in his dramas *Laxmi* and *Malati*. They had no doubt their differences but at least the meeting point. They both sacrificed their lives for the development of Oriya drama and stage.

Natya Bharati Aswini Kumar will be remembered by his country men, for ever, as a true patriot, a dedicated dramatist and a great litterateur.

Appendix

(i) *Aswini Kumar's attempt to save the first professional stage*

As stated earlier. Banamali Pati, the Naib of Balanga village of Puri district established the first professional state Radha Krishna Theatre. After his untimely death, being requested by all the party members, Aswini Kumar purchased the rights of the Theatre from Banchanidhi Mahapatra, legal heir of late Pati for Rs.1400/- in 1928. For this he paid him Rs.400/- in cash, and gave a hand note for the rest amount. The Party was renamed as 'Banamali Art Theatre' and was active for nearly 8 years even though its financial condition was never sound.

Towards 1934-35, Vikramdev Verma ascended the throne of Jeypore, a feudatory State of southern Orissa. Aswini Kumar invited him to witness his play *Konark* at Berhampur. The Maharaja visited the pandal and was given a warm ovation. He was moved very much to see the play. Aswini Kumar's request for a permanent pandal to be called 'Vikram Theatre' at Cuttack was accepted by the Maharaja, and he promised him a financial aid of Rs. 10,000/- for the purpose.

The dramatist returned to Cuttack, purchased a plot and started constructing a pandal there in anticipation of the aid. In the meantime a year passed, but Aswini Kumar neither got a reply to his query nor the promised amount came. Worried he went to Jeypore, where a clear picture of the incident came to light. A friend of Aswini Babu (whom he had introduced to the Maharaja once) had already received the entire amount from the Maharaja on his behalf saying that he had been sent by the dramatist to receive the amount. Aswini Kumar could have prosecuted the treacheror, but he pardoned him, and the

plot purchased for the permanent pandal was sold always to repay the debt. Orissa lost a permanent pandal.

The final curtain over the Banamali Art Theatre came down in 1936. Aswini Kumar sold his ancestral property including his residence to repay the debt incurred for the Theatre, left Cuttack, and went to Calcutta as a sad soul.

(ii) *His role in establishing a permanent theatre pandal at Puri*

Aswini Kumar played a vital role in establishing a permanent theatre pandal at Puri for the Annapurna 'A' Group. On his behest the Mahant of Uttara Parswa Math gave his three-storied building and the land adjacent to it, for the pandal, on a five-year lease contact. The building was situated on the side of the famous 'Bada danda', the main road of Puri and was an ideal site for the pandal. Mahant Maharaj liked and respected Aswini Kumar very much. A room in the Math was always kept in readiness for the dramatist where he stayed while at Puri. Aswini Kumar's high education, knowledge and gentleness impressed the Mahant so much that often he used to come to him for conversation. Thus they became good friends and Aswini Kumar earned the good will and confidence of the Mahant.

He was connected with the Annapurna Theatre for a long time as his plays were regularly staged there. Once Bauri Bandhu Mohanty, the manager of the party, requested him to impress upon the Mahant to give away the said land and the building for a permanent pandal on lease basis. Aswini Kumar agreed to make the request, and did so to the Mahant Maharaj at the first available opportunity. The Maharaj agreed, the lease deed was signed and the Mahant himself came to lay the plinth of the permanent pandal and assured not to disturb the party till it functioned. After the death of the Mahant, his successors tried their level best to evict the party. But till now the pandal stands on the same land. It was for the selfless endeavour of late dramatist, Aswini Kumar, that Annapurna 'A' Group got a permanent pandal at Puri.

List of Books by Aswini Kumar Ghose

DRAMAS

MYTHOLOGICAL

Bhisma	1915
Sàbitri	1917
Salabeg	1933
Dasia Bauri	1933
Tyagi Ramdas	1933
Sri-Mandira	1934
Raghu Arakhit	1937
Bandhu Mohanty	1944
Chandaluni	1946
Janaki	1952
Sakhi-Gopal	1954
Satyanarayan	1955

HISTORICAL

Seoji	1918
Kalapahad	1922
Govinda Vidyadhar	1922
Samaleswari	1924
Utkal Gaurav	1927
Konarka	1927
Kesari Ganga	1927
Paika Pua	1933
Taj Mahal	1933
Odia Jhia	1935
Bhanja Bhujanga	1936
Kapilendra Dev	1953
Bhubaneswar	1962

SOCIAL

Hindu Ramani	1937
Master Babu	1937
Irani	1937
Bhai	1942
Sri-Loknath	1946
Chasa Jhia	1946
Mamalatkar	1946
Abhinay	1953
Dukhe Sukhe	1954
Kaidi	1957

ONE-ACT PLAY

Maluni	1943
Suna Bhauja	1958

FARCES

Reformed Lady	1916
Premika Chhatra	1918

NOVELS

Mukti	
Budha Chacha	1914
Chana-bala	1959
Nari	1961

Bibliography

Aswini Kumar Ghose — *Aswini Kumar Granthabali*, Collected works Vol. I & II, Cuttack. 1963-1965.

Agnyata — *Bharatiya Rangamancha ka Bibechanatmaka Itihas*, Agra, 1978 (Hindi).

Brajendranath Bandyopadhyay — *Bangiya Natyasalar Itihas*, 1961 (Bengali).

Banshidhar Mohanty (Ed) — *Pathachakra Prabandhabali*, Bhubaneswar, 1974.

Birakishore Das — *Juge Juge Odiya Natya Sahitya*, Cuttack, 1972.

Girijashankar Ray — *Odiya Natyakala*, Cuttack, 1943.

Harekrishna Mahtab — *History of Orissa*, Vol. I & II, Cuttack, 1959.

Hemant Kumar Das — *Odiya Natakara Bikashdhara*, Madhya Parba, Part-II, Cuttack, 1980.

Odiya Natak : Udbhab O Bikash, Ph. D. Thesis, Cuttack, 1980.

Odiya Natyasahityara Bikashdhara, Bhubaneswar, 1981.

Odiya Natakara Rupabibhab, 1982.

Odiya Natakara Silpachetana, Cuttack, 1983.

Odiya Natakara Riti O Prabruti, Cuttack, 1991.

Kartik Kumar Ghose	*Odissar Rangamanch O More Nata Jiban*, Cuttack, 1981.
Mayadhar Mansingh	*The saga of the Land of Jagannath*, Cuttack, 1960.
	History of Oriya Literature, New Delhi, 1962.
Manmathnath Das (Ed)	*Sidelights on history & culture of Orissa*, 1977.
Nabin Kumar Sahu	*History of Orissa*, Cuttack, 1980.
Narayan Sahu	*Aswini Kumar Eka Adhyayan*, Ph. D. Thesis, Unpublished.
Narayan Satapathy	*Odiya Natak O Natyakar*, Cuttack, 1965.
Nilamani Mishra	*Odiya Natak Aru Rangmanch*, Allahabad, 1972.
Niladribhusan Harichandan	*Odiya Natakare Itihasara Padadhwani*, Cuttack, 1985.
Pathani Patnaik (Ed)	*Srusti O Samikhya*, Cuttack, 1975.
	Odiya Sahityara Itihasa, 1978.
Priyaranjan Sen	*Modern Oriya Literature*, Calcutta, 1947.
Rabi Nayak	*Odiya Samajik Natak O Aswini Kumar*, Ph. D. Thesis, unpublished.
Ratnakar Chaini	*Odiya Natakara Udbhaba O Bikash*, Cuttack, 1979.
Sarbeswar Dash	*Natak Bichar*, 1951.
	Odiya Natya Sahitya, Bhubaneswar, 1981.
Surendra Mohanty	*Odiya Sahityara Kramabikash*, Cuttack, 1978.
W. H. Hunter	*Orissa History*.

A versatile genius Aswini Kumar Ghose produced plays of various types – tragedy comedy, tragi-comedy, farces etc. His thematic choice was also wide that incorporated mythology, history biography, social life in dramatic creations He was quite popular with his audience for blending the religious elements with the supernatural or humanizing the divine and elevating man to a high moral and spiritual level. His straight forward language also easily impressed the common mass. He studied intimately the psychology of the average Oriya audience and gave them what they cherished most.

Dr Hemant Kumar Das (b.1938), the author of the present monograph, has written more than thirty-six books in different genres, e.g. short stories, novels, literary criticism, children's literature. In the present book he has assessed Aswini Kumar's dramatic talent, philosophy of life and finally his success and failure as a dramatist.



Cover layout Satyajit Ray
ISBN 81-260-0491-6
Rs. 25.00